Achieving our objectives
Animal health and welfare: an evolving strategy

The Government is currently consulting on a more strategic and all-embracing approach to animal health and welfare. The consultation document launched in January 2003 invites views on what a strategy for animal health and welfare in Great Britain should contain. Animal health and the way in which animals are treated is of increasing concern to the owners of animals, veterinarians, consumers, members of the public and the Government alike. In recent years we have seen only too clearly how animal diseases can be a threat to people's health, and the serious impact that they can have on the rural economy and people's everyday lives.

Our current priorities are to:

- respond promptly to all notifications of suspect cases of BSE by visiting 98% of the cases no later than the next day;
- carry out an effective programme of monitoring conditions in plants rendering Specified Risk Materials by carrying out 98% of weekly inspections;
- test 18,000 feed samples per year and investigate whether any sample contains mammalian or other processed animal protein that breeches the feed ban;
- identify the latest offspring of suspect BSE cases and exclude them from the food chain within two days of the case being reported;
- promote high welfare standards and to deal promptly with all cases of unnecessary suffering or distress found by investigating 90% of reports of suspected adverse farm animal welfare within one working day; attending 25% of market sale days; and examining 10% of export journeys of farm livestock;
- improve the identification and traceability of livestock: by upgrading and providing farmer access to the Cattle Traceability System by the end of 2004; by extending this or developing new systems progressively.

Defra's objective 6 is to protect the public's interest in relation to environmental impacts and health, and ensure high standards of animal health and welfare.

Our target is to protect public health and ensure high standards of animal welfare by reducing:

- the annual incidence of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) to less than 30 cases by normal surveillance by 2006; and
- the time taken to clear up cases of poor welfare in farmed animals by 5% by March 2004.
to capture electronic identification and movements of sheep (and possibly other species) in line with EU requirements by March 2006;

- continue to increase the resistance of national sheep flock to scrapie through the National Scrapie Plan; and

- scale up the Tuberculosis (TB) in Cattle Surveillance Programme to recover ground lost as a result of the foot-and-mouth disease epidemic, and strengthen TB control in line with EU obligations.

In our strategy consultation we set out a draft vision that we want to have achieved in 10 years’ time.

As we develop our plans for 2003–06 we will draw on this vision prior to publishing our strategy later in 2003.

The contents of our strategy are likely to reflect the following issues.

**Consistently high standards of animal health and welfare:**

- healthy and protected animals – on the farm, in the wild and in the home;

- animal welfare practices enhanced and promoted;

- ‘disease-free’ status against highly infectious diseases and the restoration of the UK’s international animal health position;

- adaptability and understanding of the changing environment and the threats this can impose on animal health and welfare;

- animal owners and Government can each take an appropriate level of responsibility for animal health;

- the right balance between the partners in animal health and welfare as to how the costs are met;

- an active role in shaping and leading EU and international agendas on animal health and welfare; and

- responsible use of veterinary medicines.

**Improved public health through:**

- reducing carriage of food-borne pathogens by food-producing animals;

- anticipating potential major food scares from animal products or any other animal-related public health surprises;

- a better informed and more effective livestock industry which is:
  - highly skilled;
  - efficient, sustainable and profitable;
Animal health and welfare – a holistic approach

- applying best practice in disease prevention (biosecurity), whether through assurance and health schemes or in other ways;
- aware of its role in producing safe food;
- working closely with private veterinary practices;
- set in the context of a thriving countryside and rural economy; and
- aware and appreciative of the widest impacts of animal health and welfare on society and our natural resources, biodiversity, environment etc.

**Capacity to deal swiftly and effectively with disease emergency:**

- improved and transparent handling of animal disease outbreaks; and
- a reduced level of international threat to animal health, and more effective and greater awareness of import controls.

A policy framework which allows:

- Government intervention that is clear and justified;
- regulation kept to the minimum necessary and appropriately enforced; and
- clear strategies for major diseases to be agreed with stakeholders.

**Professional veterinary services which are:**

- skilled to support animal health and welfare best practice;
- used by livestock keepers to promote health as well as respond to disease or welfare problems; and
- joined-up in working with the State Veterinary Service, the Veterinary Laboratories Agency, the Meat Hygiene Service and private veterinary practices.

**Use of science to ensure:**

- policy is evidence-based and scientifically informed;
- research is targeted on priority areas;
- veterinary surveillance is targeted on priority areas; and
- an active horizon-scanning programme.